UNIT 3 POPULATION EXPLOSION AND ILLITERACY

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3.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit you will be able to-

- state the meaning, causes and consequence of population explosion.
- define the meaning of illiteracy
- discuss the causes and consequence of illiteracy

3.2 INTRODUCTION

India is rapidly growing as a nation but at the same time it is the second most populated country in the world. The growth of population in India has been much higher than the resources available in the country. As a result, it has impeded the process of development in the nation. Though

availability of huge population is considered a resource for a nation but, in order to convert the population into a pool of resource, it requires the population to become literate. However despite persistent attempts by the government of India a vast majority of India's population remains illiterate. Again, since people are illiterate they are procreating more children either due to persistence of superstitious beliefs or due to the prevalence of the belief that having more children will improve their economic status (which is discussed in the next unit) which is contributing towards rapid growth of population. Thus, both population explosion and illiteracy are interrelated problems. In this unit we will try to understand about these two problems in detail.

3.3 Meaning of Population Explosion

Population explosion means sudden and rapid increase in population. It is a situation where the size of the existing human population exceeds the carrying capacity of the earth. It is an outcome of the difference between the rate of birth and the rate of death. It has been mainly caused by factors such as declining mortality rate, improved medical facilities, advancement in technology, increasing fertility rate, improved nutrition, depletion of precious resources etc. Developing nations like India are the worst sufferer's of the problem of overpopulation.

3.3.1 Causes of Overpopulation

Overpopulation has been caused by a number of factors. Let us try to understand some of its main causes-

- Declining Death Raten: One of the prime causes of overpopulation is the difference between the overall birth rate and death rate of the population. There has been an increase in birth rate and at the same time there has been a decrease in death rate due to increase in life expectancy.
- Lack of Family Planning: Most developing and under developed nations have large number of people who are illiterate,

impoverished, unaware, and have little or no knowledge about family planning. Early age of marriage is common in such poverty ridden societies and it increases the chance of having more children. Further, as they lack the understanding of the harmful effects of overpopulation, they do not adopt any family planning measures. Such conditions add to the explosive population growth.

- Immigration: Many people especially from the less developed regions prefer to migrate to those places where they can get better medical, education, security and employment facilities. Therefore the regions possessing better resources and infrastructural facilities become flooded with people due to heavy influx of people from different regions. This in turn gives rise to shortage of resources to cater to the needs of the growing population.
- Labour intensive agriculture: Till today a significant section of India's population is engaged in agriculture. Along with this despite development of technology related to agriculture, majority of agriculturists continue practising traditional methods of cultivating which require more labour and therefore having a bigger family is considered as an asset.

3.3.2 Effects of Overpopulation in India

- Depletion of the Environment: Explosive population growth leads to depletion of resources. The massive growth in population demands more space, food, shelters and other infrastructural facilities. To fulfill their growing needs, the human population has been uncontrollably cutting down forests, hunting wildlife, causing huge pollution etc. In the process of meeting the needs of such a mounting population, the ecological balance has been highly disturbed. Global Warming, Climate Change etc are clear examples of the environmental degradation. In India the area

under the forest belts have reduced over the years due to deforestation to extend the space for human settlement.

- Increasing poverty : According to Thomas Malthus population increases in a geometric progression but resources increase in arithmetic progression. Therefore, there will be fewer resources in comparison to the number people who require the resources. In other words, some people will remain deprived of their needs and will have to lead an improvised life.
- Rise in Unemployment: Over population and unemployment are inter related. As the job opportunities do not accelerate in the same scale as that of population growth, many people are bound to remain jobless. This, in turn, also results in increasing the deviant activities in the society. When people do not find opportunities to meet their basic needs, they resort to criminal activities such as stealing, dacoity etc . Thus, overpopulation even triggers criminal actions in society.
- Cost of Living Rises:The rapid growth of population leads to a widening gap between the demand and supply of different goods and commodities including the most basic ones like food, clothing and shelter. As the supply of these goods lag behind their demands, the price inevitably gets higher and people are compelled to pay more to fulfill their survival needs.
- Disintegration of Family: When a family has several mouths to feed but there is inadequate resource then people become compelled to send their children to work at an early age. Such families experience conflict and abuse within the family and also outside. As a result, the members fail to achieve the bliss of a family life and children from such families become more vulnerable. This further impacts the whole social fabric of a society.

Census Years	Population	Change in Population Between Censuses
1901	238,396,327	----------
1911	252,093,390	13,697,063
1921	251,321,213	-772,177
1931	278,977,238	27,656,025
1941	318,660,580	39,683,342
1951	361,088,090	42,427,510
1961	439,234,771	78,146,681
1971	548,159,652	108,924,881
1981	683,329,097	135,169,445
1991	846,421,039	163,091,942
2001	1,028,737,436	182,316,397
2011	1,210,193,422	181,455,986

Table: 2.5.3a

Source: Registrar General of India, Census 2011, Provisional Population Total.

3.3.3 India's population policy

Table 2.5.3a reflects the rapid population growth rate which India is experiencing. In order to tackle the problem of population explosion India has designed its population policy. After independence the population policy committee was formed in 1952 and then in 1953 the Family Planning Research and Programming Committee was formed. In the year 1956 the Central Family Planning Board was formed which stressed on sterilisation as a mechanism to decrease the population growth. During 1960s too the government of India launched different family planning measures to stabilise the population growth. During 1976 the Ministry of Health and family planning suggested various measures to decrease the growth of population like decreasing the age of marriage, putting more stress

on female literacy, increasing public awareness through media and promoting vasectomy and tubectomy operation.

In the year 2000 the Government of India adopted the National Population policy (NPP 2000) which asserts the commitment of the 'government towards voluntary and informed choice and consent of citizens while availing of reproductive health care services, and continuation of the target approach in administering family planning services'. Some of the objectives of this population policy are:

a) To ensure a stable population in India by 2045.
b) To promote development of health and infrastructural facilities associated with heath.
c) To encourage the use of contraceptives.
d) Decrease the child mortality rate.
e) To decrease the maternal mortality rate.
f) Conducting universal vaccination programmes.
g) To check the marriage of girls before 18 years and to encourage marriage after 20 years.
h) To ensure the involvement of trained nurses during the delivery of babies.
i) To ensure cent per cent registration of marriage, birth and death.
j) To prohibit and control AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases.
k) To prohibit and control the epidemic diseases.
l) To promote small family norm
m) To integrate different social sectors and to the coordinate the family welfare programmes.

When the size of population is greater than the quantity of resources available in a society, then a section of the society will remain deprived of the required resources. When people are unable to meet the basic requirements of life like food, clothing and shelter, then becoming literate becomes a far-flung dream. As a result, a significant section of the society remains illiterate.

Historically, in India, the right to attain formal education was granted to only a few castes. As a result a vast majority of the people remained illiterate. After the advent of the Britishers in India sporadic attempts were made to spread mass education. But it failed to reach the vast majority of the population and only a handful of people were touched and benefited by modern education. Thus, the erstwhile poor and marginalised people failed to avail education. After India attainted independence, it was recognised that the majority of people had remained illiterate and for the progressive transformation of the nation literacy of the citizens was utmost important. But since the increase in the size of the population aggravates the problem of poverty among the people, children become the most vulnerable section to be deprived of education or to be dropouts in many cases.Therefore illiteracy has remained a major impediment in the country's development.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q1(a). Mention four causes of population explosion.

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Q1(b). When was the Central Family Planning Board formed ?

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3.4 Meaning of Illiteracy

According to UNESCO, illiteracy is "measured by assessing reading, writing and mathematical skills in the various domains of social life which influence individual identity and insertion into society. From this perspective, literacy involves not only reading and writing but also the acquisition of the skills necessary for effective and productive performance within society" .In other words, a person may have attained the formal training of reading, writing and arithmetic skills but if he or she is unable to apply them in performing everyday activities like reading the label in the medicine

packet, filling a form etc and to make informed choices like availing the benefit of the appropriate schemes and policies etc. then he or she cannot be called literate in the true sense of the term.

According to the census of India, a person who is seven years and above, who can read and write with 'understanding' in any language can be considered literate. But a person who can read but cannot write is not considered a literate person. According to the census conducted in India in the year 2011 there has been an increase in the literacy rate to 74.04 per cent. Among all the states Kerala has topped the position with a literacy rate of 93.91 per cent followed by Mizoram where literacy rate is 91.58 per cent and Tripura having a literacy rate of 87.75 per cent. Bihar has attained the lowest position with the literacy rate of 63.82 per cent followed by Arunachal Pradesh having a literacy rate of 66.95 per cent and Rajasthan having a literacy rate of 67.06 per cent.

3.4.1 TYPES OF ILLITERACY

According to UNESCO, there are two types of illiteracy they are:

- Complete illiteracy: Complete illiteracy refers to the lack of the basic skill to read and write. It is accorded to a person who has never attended school.
- Functional illiteracy: Functional illiteracy refers to the lack of the basic minimum ability of a person to apply the education attained in his/her everyday life.

3.4.2 Causes of illiteracy

According to Ram Ahuja the following are the main causes for the persistence of illiteracy

- High level of poverty: A significant proportion of the people of the country are leading a hand-to-mouth existence. In such a situation in which people are struggling for survival, it becomes difficult for them to think about educating themselves and their children.

- High rate of population growth : It is a common idea among some poor people that if they have more children they will have more hands to earn. But children can hardly earn enough and the family gets more entangled into the shackles of poverty. In such a situation children are either bound to find work early in life or they are bound to look after their younger siblings. As a result the children are unable to attend the school.
- Lack of awareness: When majority of the population is illiterate many feel that formal education is wastage of time and money. Some people might feel that since they have spent their life comfortably without education there is no need to formally educate their successive generation too.
- Failure of government schools: Despite investment in increasing the number of schools, it is found that the government schools have failed to retain the students to a desired level.
- Government policies are not properly implemented: Despite undertaking several policies to spread education it was found that the policies are not effectively implemented. Therefore, the benefits of many education policies have failed to reach the marginalised section.
- Problem of caste barrier: Even after so many years of independence the caste barriers have remained strong in several pockets of the country. It is found that due to grave social discrimination faced by the children of the lower castes many children drop out from schools and many parents refrain from admitting their children at schools.
- Discrimination against the girls: In some societies education of girls is still considered to be a wastage of money. As a result a large number of women remain illiterate.
- Low allotment of funds: Low allotments of fund for education in general and for adult and pre-school education in particular till the seventh five year plan contributed much to the educational backwardness and illiteracy in the early plan period.

3.4.3 CONSEQUENCES OF ILLITERACY

According to UNESCO education begins at the birth and continues throughout one's life cycle and similarly the effects of illiteracy can be seen/felt throughout one's life. Some of the consequences are discussed below:

- Illiterate persons are relatively more vulnerable to get cheated while performing the everyday activities.
- According to UNESCO research conducted by the disciplines like Pschology, Neuroscience and Nutrition it is revealed that the first five years of a child are very crucial for the development of the social behaviour, health, the child's intelligence and personality. In those five years a child absorbs a great deal from his or her social environment. If the children's parents are illiterate then the development of the child in the above mentioned aspects become relatively less.
- When people are illiterate they are bound to do the unskilled and low paying jobs. They are unable to seek new and better opportunities and as a result they continue to be in the same social position. According to UNESCO ,adult illiteracy raises the chances of the present and the future socioeconomic vulnerability by passing it from one generation to the other. When the parents participation is negligible in assisting and encouraging the child in his or her schooling years then the child gradually starts performing poorly.
- People who are educated are able to take decisions rationally. This contributes towards the progress of the nation. When a vast section of a nation's population remains illiterate their decisions are influenced by others which affects the country as well. For example, it becomes easier for the miscreants to allure and brainwash illiterate people to commit illegal activities. Communal violence is an example when people act irrationally.

During communal violence miscreants ignite hatred in one community against another community.

- Different studies have found that those women who are illiterate or who drop out early are relatively less aware regarding self care, nutrition and hygiene.
- Underpayment: When people are literate they have more bargaining power. It is seen that despite experience and hard work, people are under paid because they are illiterate and it becomes easier for some people to take advantage of illiteracy.
- Superstition: In India several evil superstitions are followed which are irrational. Illiteracy further helps in perpetuating those evil practices. For example, the practice of witch hunting. Since the illiterate people do not question its validity, some people continue to encourage others to practice witch hunting for their vested interest.
- India being a democratic country ensures the participation of its citizens in the democratic process. When majority of the population remain illiterate then there are greater chances that their decisions are manipulated for the vested interest of a small section of people. Again, if the citizens remain illiterate they would lack the requisite information to effectively participate in the socio-political life. Without the citizens being aware of their rights and duties they would be unable to protect their own interests. Thus, despite economic growth the resources would remain unequally distributed and, as such, a nation cannot develop as it ought to.

3.5 Illiteracy in Assam

Assam is one of the states where a significant portion of the total population is illiterate. According to the census conducted in the year 2011, only 73% of the population was literate. Accordingly, the state ranked 26th among the 35 states in terms of literacy. Again a national level household survey concluded that the level of education in Assam is lower than the

national average. However, it was found that female literacy in urban as well as a rural areas in Assam is higher than the national average. Again, the Assam Human Development Survey revealed that the literacy rate in the 15 + age bracket was found to be the lowest among the Muslim community especially the lowest literacy rate was found in the Char areas. The Char areas are environmentally more vulnerable and it forces the people residing in these areas to continuously shift their homes. This has been affecting the lives of the people and thereby the literacy rate .

The Assam Human Development report, (2014) has revealed that illiteracy was disproportionately concentrated in certain districts. Out of 27 districts (during the course of the survey) in Assam in 12 districts namely Baksa, Barpeta, Cachar, Darrang, Dhubri, Goalpara, Kamrup, Karbi Anglong, Nagaon, Sonitpur, tinsukia and Udalguri, the concentration of illiterate people is more. In 9 out of the 12 districts with high illiteracy the majority of the population is Muslim. Besides high illiteracy is found among the adivasi and tribal population in the above mentioned districts. The report found that though a high rate of enrolment is registered at the primary level but subsequently in the successive years the drop rate increases. According to the Report, though school-based surveys depicted a different picture, the survey of the households has revealed that out of the total school children 28% of children are actually never enrolled in reality, 67.14% of the total children enrolled drop out at the subsequent class and about 4.47% of children although formally enrolled in the schools, remain absent most of the times. The highest concentrations of children who are not enrolled at all are mostly found in Kamrup, Nalbari, Tinsukia, Darrang and Dhubri discrict. Strikingly, the high drop out rate is found in Sibsagar, Lakhimpur, Jorhat, Dibrugarh, Bongaigaon and Demaji districts which are recognised as educationally forward districts in Assam.

The survey has further revealed that with education the level and kind of occupational engagement has also varied. Higher the level of education greater is the chance to get absorbed into permanent salaried work. High illiteracy can also be attributed to low development of Assam in comparison to other states despite Assam possessing abundant natural

resources. Due to illiteracy people lack the requisite awareness to effectively participate in the democratic process. Superstitious beliefs prevalent in several corners of the state and practices like witch hunting, performing black magic to cure disease etc can be removed only with the spread of education.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q2(a). State the two types of illiteracy according to UNESCO.

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Q2(b). Mention four districts in Assam where highest number of school drop-outs are found.

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3.6 LET US SUM UP

- Population explosion means sudden and rapid increase in population.
- Population explosion is a situation where the size of the existing human population exceeds the carrying capacity of the earth.
- Explosive population growth leads to depletion of resources.
- The massive growth in population demands more space, food, shelters and other infrastructural facilities.
- One of the prime causes of overpopulation is the difference between the overall birth rate and the death rate of the population.
- Over population and unemployment are interrelated.
- Literacy involves not only reading and writing but also the acquisition of the skills necessary for effective and productive performance within society.
- Over population impacts the social fabric of a society.
- Due to over population resources of a society turn out be inadequate.

- People are bound to struggle for the basic needs from an early age and as a result many children cannot attend school and remain illiterate.
- Complete illiteracy refers to the lack of the basic skill to read and write. It is accorded to those who have never attended school.
- Functional illiteracy refers to the lack the basic minimum ability to apply the education attained in one's everyday life.
- Illiterate persons are relatively more vulnerable to get cheated while performing the everyday activities.
- Illiteracy of parents impacts the overall development of children.
- Illiteracy decreases the opportunity for upward mobility.
- Illiteracy hinders one to fully participate in the democratic life.
- Illiteracy creates a conducive environment for sustaining superstions.
- According to the census conducted in the year 2011 only 73% of the population was literate.



3.7 FURTHER READING

Atal, Yogesh. 2006. *Changing Indian Society*. Jaipur: Rawat Publications.

Ahuja. Ram.2009. *Social Problems in India*. Jaipur: Rawat Publications.

3.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q No. 1a) Decline in death rate, migration, lack of family planning, labour intensive agriculture.

Ans to Q No. 1b) 1956

Ans to Q No. 2a) Complete illiteracy and functional illiteracy

Ans to Q No. 2b) Sibsagar, Lakhimpur, Jorhat, Dibrugarh



3.9 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

A) Short Questions (Answer each question in about 150 words)

Q.1. What is meant by illiteracy?

Q.2. Mention four consequences of illiteracy.

B) Long Questions (Answer each question in about 300-500 words

Q.1. 'Population explosion and illiteracy are interrelated problems'. Justify the statement with suitable example.

Q.2. Discuss the causes and consequences of illiteracy.

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